

United Engineering Company Shipyard,

HAER No. CA-295-B

Office Building No. 137

(United Engineering Company Shipyard, Administration Building)

(Building No. 2)

2900 Main Street

Alameda

Alameda County

California

HAER  
CAL  
1-ALAM,  
4B-

#### PHOTOGRAPHS

#### WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
San Francisco, California

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## HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

**UNITED ENGINEERING COMPANY SHIPYARD, OFFICE BUILDING NO. 137**  
(United Engineering Company Shipyard, Administration Building)  
(Building No. 2)

HAER No. CA-295-B

**Location:** 2900 Main Street  
Alameda  
Alameda County  
California

U.S.G.S. 7.5 minute Oakland West, Calif. quadrangle.  
Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 10.562420.41842460

**Present Owners:** 074-0891-003      074-0905-001-04  
City of Alameda      Alameda Gateway Ltd.  
City Hall      2900 Main Street  
Alameda, CA 94501      Alameda, CA 94501

**Present Occupant:** Alameda Gateway Ltd. and various tenants

**Present Use:** Office Space

**Significance:** The office building is a contributing structure in the United Engineering Company Shipyard historic district that has been determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. The United Engineering Company Shipyard, established in 1941 to build and repair ships for the U.S. Navy, is the last surviving of several large World War II shipyards in Alameda. United Engineering built 21 tugboats and repaired hundreds of ships during the war. The facility was one of the largest employers in Alameda and played an important economic and social role in the city. This was the administrative center of the shipyard.

## PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

### A. Physical History

1. **Date of erection:** the office building was constructed in 1942.
2. **Architects and engineers:** John Hudspeth, an architect responsible for the design of many of the buildings at the shipyards in the early 1940s, created most of the plans and schedules for the building in March of 1942. Alben Froberg, a local Oakland architect who also created many plans for the shipyard, designed the guard's office addition on 2 September 1941.<sup>1</sup>

John Hudspeth was an East Bay architect about whom little is known. He is not listed in an index to architectural licenses in California up to 1929. Information in the Oakland Cultural Heritage Survey identified three buildings by Hudspeth. In Oakland, he designed 1720 Franklin Street in 1941 and 2565 West Street in 1951. In Berkeley, he designed a building in Shattuck Square. In addition, he did work for the Mason-McDuffie Company and for the City of Oakland Department of Parks and Recreation.

Information on Froberg is provided in the report on Building No. 1 (HAER-295-A)

Hudson & Grady Engineers, a San Francisco firm, were responsible for the heating, plumbing, and electrical plans for the building.<sup>2</sup>

3. **Original and subsequent owners, occupants, and uses:** the office building was constructed while United Engineering owned the shipyard. In 1946, Matson Navigation purchased the property, including the office building. Todd Shipyards Corporation leased the property in 1948 and bought it in 1959. Finally, the current owner, Alameda Gateway, bought the property in 1983.

The Office Building served as the administrative center for the shipyard. Plans for the south side of the first floor indicate the rooms were designed as a "presidents office," "office," "estimating dept. repair work," "mail room," "receptionist," phone booth, "lobby," "production engineer," "planning and

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<sup>1</sup> Alben Froberg, Architect, *Alterations & Additions, Offices for United Engineering Co. Alameda, CA* (Oakland, CA, 2 September 1941). It is not clear why the drawings for the addition to the Office Building are dated earlier than those for the main building.

<sup>2</sup> Hudson & Grady Engineers, "Heating and Plumbing Plans," *Office Building, United Engineering Co. Ltd. Alameda Ship Repair Facilities* (San Francisco, CA, 18 March 1942).

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expediting dept.," and "chief accountant." An office for a "secretary" was located at the west end of the main hallway and a large accounting room was situated at the east end. Across the back of the building (north side) there was a "manager's office," "stenographers," "office," "restrooms," "boiler," "purch[asing] agent," "purchasing department," and a "vault."<sup>3</sup>

Across the front of the second floor, there were offices for "subships inspectors," "material officers," two "sbips office[s]," "cost insp[ection] officers," and an unidentified room. Along the back of the building (beginning at the west end) there were rooms for "subsbips officers," "subships design & clerical," "locker rm," "fan vent," restrooms, "locker room," two "ships offices," and "cost inspection dept."<sup>4</sup>

Throughout its history, the building has continued to serve the same function, but with changing designations. During the ownership of United Engineering, the building was sometimes referred to as building no. 22g. In 1970, the Alameda County Recorder referred to it as the administration building and as building no. 30. During the ownership of Todd Shipyards Corporation, it was known as building #137. The building currently houses the offices of Alameda Gateway and affiliate organizations, and tenants such as Peter Braun & Associates, Architects; Dashe Cellars; Ward/White; Ink Graphics; San Francisco Sails LLC; and UK Sailmakers.

4. **Builder, contractor, suppliers:** unknown
5. **Original plans and construction:** The *Office Building First Floor Plans & Schedules* were drawn 18 March 1942. Strangely, the plans for the guard's office addition, *Alterations & Additions, Offices for United Engineering Co. Alameda, CA*, are dated 2 September 1941, seven months before the plans for the main building.

The building was constructed as a two-story structure with a rectangular plan. There are exterior staircases to the second floor on the east and west ends of the building, a guard's office addition on the east facade, and a garage addition on the west facade.

6. **Alterations and additions:** close to the time of the construction of the office building, a one-story guard's office was built on the east end of the building. The addition is situated on the west end of the major entrance to the yards

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3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

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across from the larger gatehouse. The guard's office was built to match the original structure and has wooden V-groove siding, two-over-two double hung windows, a flat roof, and wooden Dutch doors. Between the guard's office and the office building there is an alley with a wooden gate.

About the same time, a small, irregular-shaped garage was added to the west side of the building. The garage has a frame structure covered with wood siding that matches the siding of the main building. The floor is concrete. The garage doors swing open and are made of a wood frame and chain link fencing.

Sometime later, probably in the late 1970s, the offices at the west end of the first floor were reorganized. The hallway was truncated, and an office suite was created. In addition, the large accounting office at the east end of the first floor was divided into a large room, a smaller office, and a break room.

**B. Historical Context**

In 1941, United Engineering purchased an existing rail maintenance and repair yard and converted the facility to a shipyard. Shortly thereafter, the company secured contracts from the United States Navy to build tugboats for the war effort and later to repair larger ships. The property continued in use exclusively as a shipyard until 1984. Since that time, it has been used primarily as a shipyard and for other marine and industrial purposes.

**PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION**

**A. General Statement**

1. **Architectural character:** The rectangular form of the building, the horizontal bands of windows on each floor, the projecting plane of the flat roof over the north and south sides of the building, and the continuous sills and lintels that unite the bands of windows all convey a functional character associated both with Modernism in architecture and with the efficiency required of World War II military buildings. The front doors with their large stainless steel, s-shaped handles are Art Deco in style. Altogether this was a typical mix of modernist imagery for its time.
2. **Condition of fabric:** a few of the offices have been reorganized, but in general, the building has been little altered. The building appears to be in good condition.

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**B. Description of Exterior**

1. **Overall dimensions:** the Office Building is a two-story building with a rectangular plan. There is an irregular one-story addition on the west end and a rectangular-shaped addition on the east end. Excluding additions, the building measures 159 feet 6 inches across the north and south sides and 40 feet across the east and west ends. The building has a total area of 12,760 square feet.
2. **Foundation:** the foundation and footings are made of reinforced concrete; the foundation is reinforced with welded steel mesh. The foundation runs around the perimeter of the building. In the middle of the perimeter foundation there are 12-by-12 inch concrete blocks.<sup>5</sup> A watertable made of vertical wood boards is flush with the exterior siding and covers the foundation. Rectangular vents made of chicken wire are set in the watertable.
3. **Walls:** the exterior walls of the Office Building are covered with wood V-groove siding painted pale green.
4. **Structural system, framing:** the building is a wood frame structure. The main structural members are 12-by-12 inch posts (around the exterior) and 10-by-12 inch posts (in the interior on both sides of the hallways). The east and west exterior walls are reinforced with 6-by-12 inch bracing beams connected to the columns by gussets. The 12-by-12 inch floor joists rest on the concrete foundation and blocks. On top of these, there are 2-by-12 inch joists. Finally, on top of the joists there is a plywood sub floor.<sup>6</sup>
5. **Porches and stairs:** there are two porches: one on the south facade and another on the north. Both porches are covered with simple cantilevered roofs, although the roof of the north porch is smaller. The structural members of the porches' roofs are extensions of the second-story floor joists. The ends of the joists are tapered, and the eaves are covered with wood siding. The main (south side) porch and stairway are made of concrete reinforced with ½-inch diameter rods spaced at six-inch intervals.<sup>7</sup> Built-in planters border the stairs. There is also an indentation for a mat in the center of the landing.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., S8.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., A6 and S5.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., S4.

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The porch roof on the rear (north) side shelters the rear doorway and staircase. The staircase and landing are constructed primarily of two-by-four and three-by-six inch wooden boards. The first floor entrance on the west facade is covered by the landing of the second floor stairway directly above. This stairway is also made of two-by-fours and three-by-sixes. The intermediary landing between the floors has a wooden ladder to the second floor.

The east staircase was added after the building was constructed. The supports are steel pipes, and the railings are wrought iron. The treads and intermediate landing are concrete. The first floor and second floor landings are made of wood. The second floor landing has a ladder, which leads to the roof. On one of the concrete treads, there is a sign, which reads, "Paymaster."

**6. Openings:**

- a. **Doorways and doors:** the building has six doorways. The main entrance is in the center of the south side. The large doorway features a pair of plate-glass doors with wooden frames. The most striking features of the entrance are the door pulls. The chrome pulls are Art-Deco inspired "S" curves that span the width of the doors. On either side of the doors, there are full-length, plate-glass sidelights. Three divided-light awning windows border these and are arranged vertically.

There are two doorways on the north facade; both are near the center of the first floor. The first door is accessible from the north porch and is a half-glassed, paneled door with a transom above. West of this doorway, there is a second door at ground level. The door is metal with vents and is wider than most — 3½ feet. This door provides access to the boiler room.

When built, the east and west ends had doorways on the first and second floors. The first floor doors were single doors, and those on the second floor were narrow double doors. The first floor door on the west facade is an original hollow-core door with original screen. There are sidelights and a transom. The double doors on the second floor of the west end have been replaced with a half-sized door and a full-sized hollow-core door. The single door on the first floor of the east end has been moved to the north end of that wall. Like those on the west end, the pair of doors on the second floor of the east end has been replaced with a half-sized door and a full-sized hollow-core door.

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- b. **Windows:** the windows are the original two-over-two, double-hung windows with wooden frames. The windows in the bathrooms are fitted with reeded glass. The windows on the south and north sides are arranged in bands of windows. Although there are breaks between the windows, continuous wooden sills and lintels unite the windows and emphasize the horizontal massing of the building. The windows on the first floor of the south side are shaded by bands of metal awnings. Hardware above the windows on the second floor suggests that there were once awnings on the second floor as well.

Although at first glance it appears the fenestration pattern of the south side is symmetrical, closer examination reveals that the bands of windows on the first and second floors are irregular combinations of single, paired, tripled, and quadrupled windows.

The fenestration of the north side is similar to that of the south side. Bands of windows on each floor are composed of single, paired, tripled and quadrupled windows. The east and west ends have single windows on either side of the second-floor doors.

**7. Roof:**

- a. **Shape, covering:** the main building, west addition, east guard's office, and garage all have flat roofs. The roofs are covered with tar and gravel.
- b. **Cornice, eaves:** the north and south sides of the building have overhanging eaves with vents. The roof edge along the east and west ends are flush with the facade.
- c. **Roof and wall attachments:** floodlights are mounted above the porch and the east corner of the south facade. There is a large metal stack on the north side of the building, which vents the interior boiler. The stack starts at the base of the building and extends through a notch in the roof eaves.

There are two vents on the roof of the guard's office addition.

**C. Description of Interior**

- 1. **First floor plan:** the first floor of the office building is composed of offices arranged along a long hall that runs east and west through the building and a

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smaller hall running north and south. At the west end there is a suite of six offices accessible from a single door at the west end of the main hallway. Across the front (south side) of the building, there is a telephone equipment room, stairway, small storage room, lobby, and three offices. The suite of rooms at the east end of the building is comprised of a large room, a smaller office, and a break room. Across the back of the first floor (beginning at the west end) there is a women's restroom, closet, men's restroom, boiler room, hallway, three offices and a vault. The offices vary in size from 177 to 563 square feet.

2. **Second floor plan:** the second floor plan is similar to that of the first except there is not a second hallway. There are five offices and a central stair in the front of the building and three offices in the back. In the center of the building on the north (back) side, there are men and women's restrooms and a break room. The hallway leads to exterior doors on the east facade.
3. **Stairways:** there is only one interior stairway. It is located on the south side of the main hall in the center of the building. The staircase has linoleum covered treads and risers with a metal and rubber non-slip edge. The solid balustrades are covered with painted plywood and have curved wooden handrails along the top.

On the second floor east of the stairway, there is a metal ladder, which leads to the roof.

4. **Flooring:** most of the hallways, bathrooms, and break rooms have linoleum tile floors. The floors of the offices are carpeted. Plans for the building indicate that the floors were originally covered with marbled green asphalt tiles except the stairs, which were linoleum.<sup>8</sup>
5. **Wall and ceiling finish:** the frame walls are covered with painted, plywood panels. The ceilings are acoustical tiles, painted plywood panels (in hallways), or dropped ceilings (mostly in the renovated areas).

On the first floor, the large office in the southwest corner of the building has wood paneled walls. The paneling appears to be original "Wellotex" paneling, as called for on the plans.<sup>9</sup> The lobby has painted wood paneling with simple trim. One of the rooms in the former accounting office (southeast

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<sup>8</sup> John Hudspeth, Architect. *Office Building First Floor Plans and Schedules* (Alameda, CA: United Engineering Co. Ltd. Alameda Ship Repair Facilities, 18 March 1) sheet 3.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., A1.

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corner) also has wood paneling, but this appears to be a later addition from the late 1960s.

**6. Openings:**

- a. **Doorways and doors:** most of the interior doors are original and are paneled, half-glassed, or Dutch doors. On the west wall of the lobby, there are two, narrow, half-glassed doors that originally led to a receptionist room and a phone booth.
- b. **Windows:** on the interior, the windows have wood torus (semicircular) trim. Interestingly, there are windows between some of the rooms such as those originally used by the purchasing department on the east end of the first floor and the subship inspectors offices on the west end of the second floor.

**7. Decorative features and trim:** there is plain, wooden floor trim.

**8. Hardware:** most original hardware has been removed and replaced with modern fixtures of standard manufactured design.

**9. Mechanical equipment:**

- a. **Heating, air conditioning, ventilation:** the building is heated by the original steam-heating system. The boiler for the building is located in the center of the first floor on the north side of the building. Unlike the offices, the boiler room has a concrete floor and an exterior door. Each office has one or two radiators. Ventilation is through windows.
- b. **Lighting:** the building was wired with electricity at the time of its construction. All sections of the building are lit with what appear to be the original incandescent fixtures. Switches and electrical equipment are located on the north facade next to the boiler stack.
- c. **Plumbing and sprinkler system:** the office building has restrooms for men and women and break rooms on each floor. The sinks, toilets, and urinals (even the wooden stalls and mirrors) are the original fixtures. The sinks and fixtures in the first and second floor break rooms are later additions. Fire sprinklers located in the hallways and offices are original to the building.

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- d. **Equipment:** there is a large vault on the first floor. The vault doors are steel, and the walls, ceiling, and floor are 10-inch thick concrete reinforced with ½-inch diameter rods running vertically and horizontally every 12 inches. The rods are situated ½ inch below the surface of the wall.<sup>10</sup> Inside there are the original wooden shelves. A label on the door reads, "Diebold Safe & Lock Co.", a later sticker says "East Bay Safe & Lock Co."

10. **Original Furnishings:** there are original wooden employee lockers in the break room on the second floor.

**D. Site**

1. **General setting and orientation:** the office building is located south of the Inspection and Repair Shops building and west of the gate house. The building is surrounded by asphalt. The area south of the building is used as a parking lot.

**PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION**

**A. Original Architectural Drawings, Maps and Plans**

Alameda Gateway. *Existing Site Plan*. 30 January 1984.

Froberg, Alben, Architect. *Alterations & Additions, Offices for United Engineering Co. Alameda, CA*. Oakland, CA, 2 September 1941.

Hudson & Grady Engineers. *Office Building, United Engineering Co. Ltd. Alameda Ship Repair Facilities*. San Francisco, CA, 18 March 1942.

Hudspeth, John, Architect. *Office Building*. Alameda, CA: United Engineering Co. Ltd. Alameda Ship Repair Facilities, 18 March 1942.

Kennedy, Clyde C., Engineering Office of. "Area Plan and Interceptor Profile: Improvements to Sewer System for Properties Occupied by Todd Shipyards Corp., Alameda, Calif." Prepared for Matson – United Properties, Inc. 9 August 1951.

Sanborn Map Company. *Insurance Maps of Alameda, California*, p. 93. New York: 1948.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., S8.

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United Engineering Company Ltd. *Alameda Shipyard, San Francisco Area*, Sketch No. 48. 10 February 1944.

United Engineering Company Ltd. *Alameda Shipyard: Map Showing Existing Facilities and Those Under Construction*. 22 October 1942.

United Engineering Company Ltd. *Map of Alameda Shipyard Showing Existing and Proposed Additional Facilities*. Plan no. UEC-A-1-7. 14 June 1943.

**B. Bibliography**

Alameda County Recorder. Exhibit B: Description of Buildings, Waterfront Improvements, Shipyard Utilities, Machinery and Equipment. 18 February 1970. RE: 2568, IM 80-82.

Thompson, Richard G., Lieutenant Colonel, San Francisco District, Corps of Engineers. Letter to Cherilyn Widell, State Historic Preservation Officer, requesting Determination of Eligibility. 30 April 1998.

United Engineering Company Ltd. Memo to Chief of the Bureau of Yards and Docks. "Reproduction Costs and Market Value to Third Parties of 'Civil Works'", with Estimated Schedule of "Civil Works" Facilities. 8 February 1946.

United States. Army Corps of Engineers – San Francisco District and California. State Historic Preservation Officer. Memorandum of Agreement Regarding the Oakland Harbor Navigation Improvements Project, Alameda County, California. Signed 31 January 2001 and 22 January 2001.

Widell, Cherilyn, State Historic Preservation Officer. Letter to Richard G. Thompson, Lieutenant Colonel, San Francisco District, Corps of Engineers, Regarding Oakland Harbor Ship Channel Deepening and Improvements, Alameda County [Determination of Eligibility Concurrence]. 9 June 1998.

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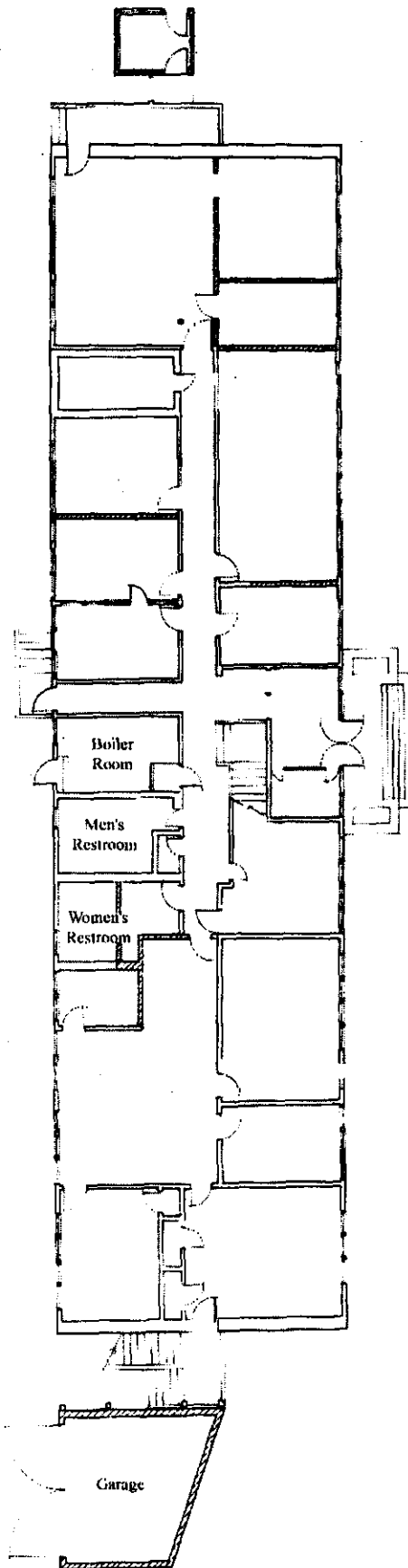
**PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION**

This report was prepared for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Port of Oakland in accordance with a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, San Francisco District and the California State Historic Preservation Officer concerning the former United Engineering Company shipyard. The Port of Oakland and the City of Alameda were concurring parties to the MOA. The MOA was created because of a proposal by the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers in partnership with the Port of Oakland to sponsor the Oakland Harbor Navigation Improvements Project. This project "would deepen Oakland Harbor channels and berth areas from -42 feet mean lower low water (MLLW) to -50 feet MLLW, with 2 feet overdredge allowance" and widen some portions of the channels. These actions, which would constitute an Undertaking under Section 106, would result in the demolition of several buildings and structures at the former United Engineering Company Shipyard. Because the shipyard had been determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, the Undertaking would have an adverse effect on the property. Under the MOA, the following HAER documentation has been prepared: a written historic and descriptive report on the shipyard as a whole, seventeen separate reports on individual buildings and structures in the shipyard, including this report, and photographic documentation.

This building will not be demolished by the federal undertaking.

This report was prepared by Jody Stock, architectural designer, and Michael R. Corbett, architectural historian. Corbett was a subcontractor to Basin Research Associates of San Leandro. Basin Research was under contract to g. borchard & associates.

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**BUILDING NO. 2:  
OFFICE BUILDING**  
First Floor Plan

Prepared by Jody R. Stock  
2/11/01



NORTH

0 4 8 16 24 feet

\*Plan is based on scaled drawing, John Hudspeth, Architect, *Office Building*. Alameda, CA: United Engineering Co. Ltd. Alameda Ship Repair Facilities. 18 March 1942. The plan has been altered to reflect current field conditions. The walls that have been added (after the 1942 plan) are indicated with hashmarks and are not to scale. The first floor is used as the offices of Alameda Gateway Corp. and leased to various tenants. All rooms are used as offices or storage unless otherwise noted on the plan. The plan of the second floor is similar to that of the first and is leased as office space.